

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 IO-13 EA-07 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3940

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLMABAD

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 1461

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: INT, BG

SUBJ: POSSIBLE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

1. GOLAM WAHEED CHOUDHURY, ONE-TIME HEAD OF DACCA UNIVERSITY POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS IN YAHYA'S CABINET, 1970-71, VISITED BANGLADESH FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE INDEPENDENCE (HENIS PROFESSOR AT NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY) DURING LAST WEEK AND HAD TWO RATHER LAONG CONVERSATIONS WITH GENERAL ZIA WITH CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES AND FOREIGN POLICH PRINCIPAL TOPICS. CHOUDHURY FILLED IN POLITICAL COUNSELOR ON SUBSTANCE PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM DACCA MARCH 21.

2. CVHOUDHURY SAID ZIA IS CONCERNED ABOUT LACK OF FORMAL POPULAR BASE FOR HIS REGIME AND IS EXPLORING SEVERAL MEANS TO OBTAIN SUCH SANCTION. CHOUDHURY ADVISED AGAINST USE OF RECENTLY ELECTED UNION COUNCILLORS (AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILLORS WHO WILL BE ELECTED IN MAY) AS ELECTORAL COLLEGE IN THE MANNER IN WHICH AYUB KHAN OBTAINED APPROVAL BY REFERENDUM IN 1960. HE SAID HE ADVISED ZIA TO USE POPULAR DIRECT REFERENDUM TO OBTAIN APPROVALNOF ZIA AS
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PRESIDENT AND AT SAME TIME APPROVE A PROGRAM WHICH ZIA WOULD ANNOUNCE AS PVART OF HIS ELECTORAL MESSAGE. VOTE WOULD BE SIMPLE YES OR NO POLL, BUT WOUWD SUPPORT REGIME, PERSON AND PROGRAM. ZIA, ACCORDING TO CHOUDHRUY, WOULD PREFER THIS METHOD.

3. CHOUDHURY BELIEVES ZIA INTENDS TO MAKE MAJOR PRONOUNCE-

MENT ON CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES ON INDEPENDENCE DAY, MARCH 26. AT ZIA'S REQUEST CHOUDHURY DRAFTED AND GAVE TO ZIA A NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS ON A CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK (CHOUDHURY'S EARLIER ACADEMIC WORK CENTERED ON CONSTITUTION MAKING AND HE WAS A KEY ADVISER TO YAHYA IN 1970-71.) DOCUMENT, WHICH CHOUDHURY SAID HE WOULD PROVIDE TO POLCOUNSELOR BY MAIL ON HIS RETURN TO U.S., PROVIDES FOR INTERIM GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD BE PRESIDENTIAL IN FORM AND WHICH WOULD INCLUDE PROVISIONS OF 1972 CONSTITUTION (LESS MUJIB'S OBJECTIONABLE AMENDMENTS) NOT REPUGNANT TO THAT FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

4. ZIA COMPLAINED TO CHOUDHURY THAT THE COUNCIL OF ADVISORS WAS NOT AN EFFECTIVE GROUP AND THAT HE FELT ONE PROBLEM WAS IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WHERE PRESIDENT SAYEM HELD THE PORTFOLIO. HE WENT ON TO SUGGEST THAT CHOUDHURY MIGHT BE WILLING TO JOIN THE COUNCIL WITH THAT PORTFOLIO. CHOUDHURY SAID HE WAS WILLING TO BE OF WHATEVER ASSISTANCE HE COULD, BUT THAT HE COULD NOT FOR THE MOMENT CONSIDER A RETURN TO BANGLADESH AND WOULD HAVE TO SOUND OUT HIS FAMILY AT A MINIMUM. BUT HE ADDED TO ZIA THAT COUNCIL SHOULD BE RECONSTITUTED AS REGULAR CABINET WITH MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENTS DRAWN FROM AMONG PERSONS WITH POLITICAL EXPERIENCE AND NOT AS AT PRESENT FROM THE "AGED FAILURES". CHOUDHURY THOUGHT THIS COULD AND, PERHAPS, WOULD FOLLOW REFERENDUM.

5. ZIA ALSO DISCUSSED AT LENGTH BANGLADESHI FOREIGN RELATIONS. CHOUDHURY SAID HE CAUTIONED ZIA ON TAKING TOO BELLICOSE A STAND AGAINST INDIA AND SUGGESTED THAT BANGLADESH MUST RECOGNIZE THE REALITIES OF THE SITUATION.

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BANGLADESH WOULD BE NO MATCH FOR INDIA IF INDIA DECIDED TO ACT STRONGLY AND, SECONDLY, BANGLADESH COULD NOT COUNT ON MATERIAL ASSISTANCE FROM ANYONE. THE UNITED STATES, SAID CHOUDHURY, WOULD ACT IN THE DIPLOMATIC AND UN ARENAS AND CHINA WOULD VOICE SUPPORT, BUT NEITHER COULD GIVE MILITARY AID AND MEANWHILE BANGLADESH WOULD BE OVERWHELMED. CHOUDHURY WAS ALSO CAUTIOUS ON PAKISTAN AND SAID HE TOLD ZIA THAT BANGLADESH SHOULD BE WARY OF TAKING SIDES IN INDO-PAKISTAN SQUABBLES AND BECOMING INVOLVED WITH NO BENEFIT GAINED. BANGLADESH ALSO SHOULD NOT USE PAKISTAN AS CONDUIT TO ITS RELATIONS WITH CHINA OR WITH THE ISLAMIC COUNTRIES. HE NOTED THAT ZIA'S TRIPS TO CHINA AND IRAN WERE EXCELLENT DEMONSTRATIONS OF BANGLADESH'S INTENTION TO CARRY ON ITS DIPLOMACY ON ITS OWN.

6. ZIA ASKED ABOUT RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. CHOUDHURY SAID THAT BANGLADESH HOLDS NO STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR THE U.S., BUT THAT THERE WAS GREAT GOODWILL AND A SINCERE DESIRE TO ASSIST BANGLADESH IN ITS DEVELOPMENT.

ZIA MENTIONED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO VISIT THE U.S. CHOUDHURY SUGGESTED THE NEXT UNGA SESSION, BUT SAID CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATORS ARE UNLIKELY TO HAVE MUCH IMPACT IN WASHINGTON, BUT PRESIDENTS DO. ZIA SAID HE WAS CONCERNED THAT TOO CLOSE AN APPROACH TO CHINA MIGHT BE VIEWED IN THE U.S. AS A ONE-SIDED POSITION. CHOUDHURY RESPONDED THAT IN HIS VIEW THE CHINESE AND AMERICAN POSITIONS IN THE SUB-CONTINENT WERE GENERALLY SIMILAR AND THAT WITHIN LIMITATIONS AMERICANS WOULD NOT BE OVERLY CONCERNED WITH ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS WITH CHINA. ZIA MENTIONED MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND CHOUDHURY SAID HE THOUGHT THE LIMITATIONS MIGHT BE CLOSER IN THIS FIELD.

7. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO REASON TO DOUBT THE ACCURACY OF CHOUDHURY'S ACCOUNT OF HIS MEETINGS WITH ZIA. HIS COMMENTS OF POSSIBLE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES FIT INTO GROWING PATTERNS OF THOUGHT THAT ZIA WILL ASSUME PRESIDENCY FOLLOWING EXPRESSION
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OF POPULAR SUPPORT AND THAT PARTICIPATION IN CABINET WILL INCLUDE SOME WITH POLITICAL EXPERIENCE ALONG WITH, PROBABLY, SOME WHO ARE TECHNICAL SPECIALISTS (E.H.V., HUDA IN PLANNING). CHOUDHURY'S COMMENT TO ZIA THAT TO ACT EARLY WOULD MEAN SUCCESS BUT DELAY MIGHT CAUSE HIM TO LOSE THE EVIDENT POPULARITY HE NOW HAS GIVE SOME SUBSTANCE TO FEELING THAT MARCH 26 MAY BE DAY FOR MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT. BUT WE HAVE SEEN "KEY DATES" PASS BEFORE.
MASTERS

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